Published: July 24, 2016, *Kokomo Tribune* [Page: A4]

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Editorial: They liked Mike, not Ted

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz's speech Wednesday night at the Republican National Convention in Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland started out well enough. He congratulated one-time rival and now Republican nominee Donald Trump to applause.

Then, the wheels started to come off.

"We're fighting, not for one particular candidate or one campaign," he said. This garnered some polite applause and a "USA" chant. The crowd probably thought this was building to a Trump endorsement.

"To those listening, please, don't stay home in November," said Cruz. "Stand, and speak, and vote your conscience, vote for candidates up and down the ticket who you trust to defend our freedom and to be faithful to the Constitution."

Flashes of anger rippled through the crowd. "Endorse Trump!" they chanted.

"I appreciate the enthusiasm of the New York delegation," said Cruz.

The scene was excruciating to watch, as Cruz was drowned out by boos and lost in a cross-wind of applause as Trump entered the hall.

Trump’s vice presidential candidate, Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, was tasked with cleaning up this mess on what was meant to be his showcase night.

Brought to the stage by House Speaker Paul Ryan, Pence repeated his familiar line of being “a Christian, a conservative and a Republican, in that order.”

In his introduction to a nationwide audience largely unaware of him before Trump’s nod, he was at times self-effacing while establishing his conservative bona fides. He touted the values of President Reagan, emphasized coal production and stressed the importance of Supreme Court picks. He decried violence against police, abortion and said presumptive Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton should be “disqualified.” Most importantly, though, he gave a full-throated endorsement of Trump.

“We like Mike!” chanted the crowd.

The ironic twist to all this is that Pence endorsed Cruz just days before his spectacular, Carly Fiorina-backed flame-out in the Indiana primary in May. His presidential ambitions intact, Pence changed his allegiance to Trump shortly after. It was no surprise to us when he ended up as Trump’s vice presidential pick. The shrewdness with which he played Wednesday’s speech is a fair indication of why he made it this far.

As for Cruz, he may be trying to set himself up for a 2020 campaign, but it probably would have been better if he hadn’t said anything at all.